

REMARKS

The specification has been amended to correct errors of a typographical and grammatical nature. Due to the number of corrections thereto, applicants submit herewith a Substitute Specification, along with a marked-up copy of the original specification for the Examiner's convenience. The substitute specification includes the changes as shown in the marked-up copy and includes no new matter. Therefore, entry of the Substitute Specification is respectfully requested.

The claims and abstract have also been amended to more clearly describe the features of the present invention.

Entry of the preliminary amendments and examination of the application is respectfully requested.

To the extent necessary, applicants petition for an extension of time under 37 CFR 1.136. Please charge any shortage in the fees due in connection with the filing of this paper, including extension of time fees, to the deposit account of Antonelli, Terry, Stout & Kraus, LLP, Deposit Account No. 01-2135 (Case: 529.44127X00), and please credit any excess fees to such deposit account.

Respectfully submitted,

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MARKED-UP SPECIFICATION

ULTRASONIC DIAGNOSTIC APPARATUS

5 Technical Field

The present invention relates to an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus, and, more particularly, to an effective technique ~~of applying for using,~~ in a three-dimensional scan of
10 an object, a two-dimensional array probe in which a plurality of transducer elements for transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave are two-dimensionally arranged.

Background of the Invention

Along with ~~the recent development of developments in~~
15 the performance of ultrasonic diagnostic apparatuses and in
the use of a ultrasound diagnostic ~~technique techniques,~~ the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatuses are being utilized in various fields of diagnosis, and a three-dimensional display of an image is now desired in ~~the performing a~~ diagnosis using
20 ultrasound. Usually, it was necessary for displaying a three-dimensional image display to collect a plurality of tomographic images of an object to be examined at ~~every a~~
plurality of predetermined distance distances and to reconstruct a three-dimensional image ~~in a manner of by~~
25 joining the outlines of an organ or the like ~~being which forms~~ an imaging object (observing object) extracted from those tomographic images.

However, when an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus has

a two-dimensional probe, including two-dimensionally arranged transducer elements in a flat surface, and an aperture is formed by concentric multiple rings on the two-dimensional ultrasound probe, ~~a~~the direction of forming an ultrasound beam is limited to the direction of a normal line ~~of the~~ the probe surface. Accordingly, ~~the a~~ three-dimensional image could not be generated by utilizing the above-described combination of ~~the~~ ultrasound beams. Further, because an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus employing a sparse array technique performs a sector scan with an ultrasound beam without moving the aperture, it is impossible to cross ultrasound beams in the ultrasound measurement. Accordingly, it was impossible to apply a method of generating a tomographic image using ~~the a~~ combination of ultrasound beams.

Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. Hei.9-234199 discloses an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus including an ultrasound probe having a plurality of transducers arranged in a scan direction and a lens direction for transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave, which apparatus further includes selecting means for selecting a transducer to be driven from among the plurality of transducers, ultrasound transmitting means for driving the transducer selected by the selecting means in the scan direction and in the lens direction on the basis of predetermined delay data so as to generate a transmitted beam having a focal point at a certain depth in the scan direction and the lens direction, inputting means for inputting information on an object to be examined, and control

means for controlling the ultrasound transmitting means in accordance with the information on the object. However, a compound scan using a two-dimensional array probe is not disclosed.

5 An object of the present invention is to provide a technique with which a tomographic image of high resolution can be collected by means of ~~the~~ compound scan while the transducers of a two-dimensional ultrasound transducer array are switched, and to provide a technique with which the image
10 quality can be improved by using ~~the~~ a two-dimensional ultrasound transducer array without increasing the scale of the apparatus.

Summary of the Invention

15 To solve the above-described problem, the object of the present invention is to provide a technique with which a tomographic image can be collected using a two-dimensional array ultrasound probe. Another object of the present invention is to provide a technique with which the image
20 quality of a diagnostic image can be improved using a two-dimensional array ultrasound probe without increasing the apparatus scale.

Brief Description of the Drawings

25 Fig.1 is a diagram illustrating the structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 of the present invention.

~~Fig.2 is a~~ Figs. 2(a) and 2(b) are diagram diagrams

illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 of the present invention.

5 ~~Fig.3 is a diagram~~ Figs. 3(a) and 3(b) are diagrams illustrating the positional relation between an ultrasonic wave received by each transducer element according to Embodiment 1 and a focal point F.

10 ~~Fig.4 is a diagram~~ illustrating an ultrasound tomographic image obtained with ~~a~~ the scan of an ultrasound beam in a different beam direction than that according to Embodiment 1.

15 ~~Fig.5 is a diagram~~ Figs. 5(a), 5(b) and 5(c) are diagrams illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2 of the present invention.

~~Fig.6 is a diagram~~ illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 3 of the present invention.

20 ~~Fig.7 is a diagram~~ illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 3 of the present invention.

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

25 Hereinafter, various embodiments of the present invention will be described with reference to the drawings. ~~Through In the drawings illustrating the embodiments of the invention,~~ constituents having an identical function are given an identical reference numeral designation, and ~~the a~~

~~repeated explanation for the repetition thereof~~ is omitted.

(Embodiment 1)

Fig. 1 shows the ~~schematic structure illustrating of an~~
embodiment of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to
the present invention. This ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus is
designed to form an ultrasound beam with a two-dimensional
transducer array and for scanning ~~and the beam~~ to obtain an
ultrasound image of a portion under diagnosis inside an object
to be examined in real time, ~~including~~. The apparatus

includes ultrasound transducer 4, element selection data unit
11, transmission unit 2, received wave phasing unit 7,
transmission-reception separating circuit 3, signal processing
unit 8, image processing unit 9, monitor 10, and control unit 1.

A probe is designed to transmit and receive an
ultrasonic wave inside the object, ~~having and for this purpose~~
it has a plurality of two-dimensionally arranged transducers 4,
4, Those transducers 4, 4, ... are two-dimensionally
arranged, ~~one with 1~~ to m elements being arranged in the X
direction and ~~one 1~~ to n elements being arranged in the Y
direction in a plane.

Transducers 4, 4, ... are connected with a connection
switch group 5 combined with an arbitrary channel of the
phasing circuit. This connection switch group 5 is connected
to switch control unit 6 for controlling its switching operation.

Element selection data unit 11 is designed to store
element selection data based on the transducer array, ~~and~~
~~including as well as~~ ultrasound scan information for forming an
aperture for ultrasound transmission and reception. The data

read out therefrom ~~are~~is transmitted to switch control unit 6,
and on/off switching of connection switch group 5 is
determined by ~~the control of~~provided by the switch control
unit 6 so as to form ~~the~~an aperture for ultrasound
5 transmission and reception.

Transmission unit 2 is designed to apply a
transmission signal having a delay to ~~transducer~~transducers 4
of the probe forming the aperture of the ultrasound
transmission and reception so that the ultrasonic waves are
10 focused on a desired focal point. Received wave phasing unit
7 is designed to perform a desired focus processing and phase
addition on a reflected echo signal received by transducer 4
and to form a received beam. Transmission-reception
separating circuit 3 is designed to switch connection of a
15 transducer 4 to the transmission unit 2 ~~in~~during transmission
and to the received wave phasing unit 7 ~~in~~during reception.

Signal processing unit 8 is designed to receive the
received signal sent from received wave phasing unit 7, ~~and to~~
perform processings including detection, compression, and
20 edge enhancement, and to obtain data for one scan line.
Image processing unit 9 is designed to receive the data sent
from signal processing unit 8 and perform scan conversion,
interpolation and the like, ~~and so as to present them~~an image
on monitor 10. Monitor 10 is designed to display the data
25 input from image processing unit 9 as an ultrasound image.
Control unit 1 is designed to control the operations of the
above-described components.

~~Fig. 2 is a~~Figs. 2(a) and 2(b) are diagram diagrams

illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 of the present invention. Specifically, Fig._2(a) is a diagram illustrating the structure in the case where the aperture is formed by concentric multiple rings to collect a tomographic image, and Fig._2(b) is a diagram illustrating the structure in the case where the transducer elements are bundled into strip shapes to collect a tomographic image. In Fig.2 these figures, numerical reference 7 represents a phasing circuit, numerical reference 8 represents an adder, numerical reference 9 represents an image processing unit, numerical reference 10 represents a monitor, numerical reference 15 represents a transducer element, numerical reference 16 represents an aperture formed by bundled rings, numerical reference 17 represents a switch array, and numerical reference 14 represents an aperture formed by bundled strip-shaped pieces. Hereinafter, a one-dimensional scan in the Y direction performed by the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 will be described.

As shown in Figs._2(a) and 2(b), the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 includes an ultrasound probe in which transducer elements 15 are two-dimensionally arranged, a switch array 17 is disposed in the side of an ultrasound probe for selecting a transducer element to be used in ultrasound transmission and reception, a received wave phasing unit 7 is provided for applying a delay for received wave phasing to a received signal from the ultrasound probe, an image processing unit 9 is provided for

generating a tomographic image from information on an intersecting point of an ultrasound beam obtained by the multiple ring transducer and that obtained by the strip-shaped transducer, and a monitor 10 is used for displaying the tomographic image that is generated. Although switch array 17 is installed in the ~~side of~~ ultrasound probe according to Embodiment 1, ~~it of course, it~~ may be provided in the ~~side of~~ main body of the apparatus. However, installing switch array 17 in the ~~side of~~ ultrasound probe leads to a reduction of in the number of signal lines connecting the ultrasound probe and the main body. In ~~Fig. 2~~ Figs. 2(a) and 2(b), the structure of the transmission system is omitted.

The ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 includes control means for controlling the switch array 17 ~~and to selecting select~~ transducers arranged in ring shapes from among the two-dimensionally arranged transducer elements 4 so as to form ring-like apertures for transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave and to ~~perform a~~ scan the ultrasonic wave in a Y-axis direction designated by ~~an the~~ arrow with an aperture 16 formed by bundled rings. The control means also operates to ~~controls control the~~ switch array 17 ~~and to selects select~~ transducers arranged in strip shapes from among the two-dimensionally arranged transducer elements 4, ~~and forms so as to form~~ apertures for forming an ultrasound beam in an oblique direction different from a normal line direction of the probe surface. Meanwhile, the control means controls the received wave phasing unit 7 in correspondence with the shape of the aperture and the beam

direction in the case of forming any aperture.

In ~~Fig. 2~~ Figs. 2(a) and 2(b), the ultrasound probe according to Embodiment 1 includes a plurality of two-dimensionally arranged transducer elements for transmitting and receiving ultrasonic waves to/from the inside of the object to be examined (not shown), ~~which so as to~~ collect an ultrasound signal. Those transducer elements 4 are arranged in a ~~plain-plane~~ in a longitudinal axis direction ~~being representing~~ one direction of the two-dimensional array of transducer elements 4 (Y-axis direction in Fig. 2(a)) and in a minor axis direction ~~being representing~~ another direction (X-axis direction in Fig. 2(a)) perpendicular to the longitudinal axis direction.

In the arrangement of transducer elements 4, ~~e.g. for~~ example, twenty-eight transducer elements 4 are arranged in the Y-axis direction, and the surface of ultrasound transmission and reception of transducer elements 4 is a plane oriented with respect to the transmitting direction of the ultrasound waves. However, the arrangement of transducer elements 4 in the Y-axis direction is not limited to a ~~plain-plane~~ surface, and it also may be determined so that the surface of the array of transducer elements 4 forms an arc that is convex in shape with respect to the transmitting direction of the ultrasound waves.

Further, in the minor axis direction (X-axis direction in Fig. 2(a)) fourteen transducer elements 4 are arranged, and the surface of ultrasound transmission and reception of the transducer elements 4 is a plane oriented with respect to the

transmitting direction of the ultrasound waves. Meanwhile, in a similar manner, as to the transducer elements in the Y direction, transducer elements 4 may be arranged in the X-axis direction so as to form an arc that is convex in shape in the transmitting direction of the ultrasound waves.

Switch array 17 includes element selecting switches, the number of which is equal to the ~~channel~~ number of channels of the received wave phasing unit 7 x the number of transducer ~~element number~~ elements in the Y-axis direction (direction of ultrasound scanning) x the number of transducer ~~element number~~ elements in the X-axis direction, i.e. $8 \times 28 \times 14 = 3136$. Particularly, as shown in Figs. 2(a) and 2(b), $8 \times 28 = 244$ element selecting switches, according to Embodiment 1, are arranged in a matrix shape at each row in the X-axis direction, and an arbitrary channel of the received wave phasing unit 7 can be connected to any row of transducer ~~element~~ elements 4 by respectively switching the element selecting switches. Accordingly, by shifting the element selecting switches forming the switch array 17, a multiple ring aperture 16, e.g. formed by Fresnel rings, and a strip-shaped aperture 14 are sequentially moved in the X and Y directions shown by arrows on a probe surface so as to transmit and receive an ultrasound beam and acquire three-dimensional data. However, an actual ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus requires several dozens to several hundreds of transducer elements for forming apertures.

Received wave phasing unit 7 includes a plurality of phasing circuits corresponding to the larger number between

the arranged element number of concentric rings and that of the rectangular element arrays, e.g. eight-channel phasing circuits. Meanwhile, the structure of the phasing circuit may be similar to a conventional one. Further, according to

5 Embodiment 1, ultrasound beams are sequentially formed by Fresnel-ring aperture 16 and strip-shaped aperture 14.

Therefore, the phasing circuit group reads out and sets phasing data corresponding to the aperture from a table (not shown) in response to an aperture instruction signal received
10 from the control unit (not shown).

Signal processing unit 8 ~~is~~ may be provided in the form
of a known adder for summing up the received signals output from the received wave phasing means having eight channels forming received wave phasing unit 7 after phasing, ~~and~~ thus
15 forming an ultrasound beam.

Signal processing unit 9 includes storing means for temporarily storing a first ultrasound image generated by an ultrasound beam obtained by transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave with Fresnel-ring aperture 16 and
20 corresponding to the direction of a normal line of the probe surface and a second ultrasound image generated by an ultrasound beam obtained by transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave from strip-shaped aperture 14 and being oblique with respect to the normal line direction of the probe.

25 Further, image processing unit 9 includes image calculating means (not shown) for generating one tomographic image and/or three-dimensional image using a known imaging method referred to as a compound scan, in which a

tomographic image is generated on the basis of an ultrasound tomographic image obtained by scanning ultrasound beams in various beam directions from tomographic information on a position where ultrasound beams intersect, i.e., using
5 information of a phased received signal from a position where ultrasound beams intersect. Further, image processing unit 9 has converting means for performing known volume rendering processing, surface rendering processing, and the like for converting the obtained three-dimensional image into a
10 two-dimensional image to be displayed (three-dimensional ultrasound image). The details of ~~the~~ such a compound scan ~~is~~ are mentioned in Robert R. Entekin, "Real-Time spatial compound imaging-Technical performance in vascular applications", Acoustical Imaging, Vol.25, 2000.

15 Next, operations ~~of~~ for collecting an ultrasound tomographic image using Fresnel-ring aperture 16 and strip-shaped aperture 14 according to Embodiment 1 will be described with reference to Figs. 2(a) and 2(b). In the following description, Fresnel-ring aperture 16 is formed by
20 bundling transducer elements 4 in three ring-shapes, and strip-shaped aperture 14 is formed by bundling eight strip lines of transducer elements 4 in the X-axis direction. However, the number of rings and strip lines is not limited thereto.

25 As shown in Fig. 2(a), the control means ~~switches on and off~~ operates to the switch array 17 on and off to bundle two-dimensionally arranged transducer elements 4 into three ring shapes, and thus, a Fresnel-ring aperture 16 is formed.

At this time, the control means sets phasing data at each channel of the received wave phasing unit 7 so as to form a focal point in a direction of a normal line extending from central points of those three rings. That is, transducer elements 4 are selected so that ~~a~~the distance between each of the transducer elements 4 forming an identical ring and the focal point becomes substantially the same, and predetermined phasing data ~~are~~is supplied to the phasing circuit connected with the selected transducer element group.

Here, a signal is output from the adder unit by transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave with aperture 16 and which has been made into an ultrasound beam extending equally in any direction, i.e. extending in a normal line direction from the central point of aperture 16. ~~Positional~~
The positional relation between an ultrasonic wave received by each transducer element 4 and the focal point F is shown in ~~Fig. 3~~Figs. 3(a) and 3(b). As is clear from ~~Fig. 3~~Figs. 3(a) and 3(b), the focal point formed by aperture 16 is in the direction of a normal line of the Fresnel rings.

Next, aperture 16 is moved in the direction of ~~an~~the arrow shown in Fig. 2(a) while the control means controls switching of the respective element selecting switches of the switch array 17 at every ultrasound transmission and reception to retain Fresnel-ring aperture 16, and thus, a linear scan can be performed in ~~the~~a state where the ultrasound beam direction is retained in the normal line direction.

When a scan using Fresnel-ring aperture 16 is completed, the control means then switches ~~on and off~~the

switch array 17 on and off so that strip-shaped aperture 14 is formed by a plurality of transducer element arrays in the Y-axis direction, as shown in Fig.2(b). At this time, the control means controls the received wave phasing unit 7 to
5 adjust the phasing data supplied to a signal received at each transducer element array so that an ultrasound beam from aperture 14, formed by eight transducer element arrays, is ~~made into that~~ directed in an oblique direction which does not coincide with the normal line direction at the central point of
10 aperture 14.

Here, a signal output from the adder, by transmitting and receiving an ultrasonic wave with aperture 14, is made into an ultrasound beam having a predetermined angle with respect to the ultrasound beam of aperture 16. That is, when
15 the central points of aperture 16 and of aperture 14 are identical, focal points F and F' are respectively located at different positions, as shown in Fig. 3(b). However, ~~different from~~ in contrast to the ultrasound beam of Fresnel-ring aperture 16, the oblique angle θ of the ultrasound beam of the strip-shaped aperture 14 can be arbitrarily set with respect to
20 the surface of the transducer element array of aperture 14 by adjusting the phasing data of each row of transducer elements.

At this time, aperture 14 is moved in ~~a~~ the direction of the arrow shown in Fig. 2(b) while the control means switches ~~on and off~~ each transducer selecting switch of switch array 17 on and off in synchronism with ~~a~~ the cycle of ultrasound transmission and reception to retain strip-shaped aperture 14,
25

and a linear scan, i.e. an oblique scan, can be performed in
the ~~a~~ state where the ultrasound beam direction is retained in
an oblique direction. According to Embodiment 1, the
ultrasound scan with strip-shaped aperture 14 ~~is~~, as will be
5 described below, is performed in two different directions.
Therefore, when the scan with focal point F' shown in Fig. 3 is
completed, the control means then conducts a scan ~~with at~~
another oblique angle (e.g. $(-\theta)$) shown in Fig. 4). Meanwhile,
this scan ~~with at~~ another oblique angle is not essential, and
10 the oblique scan may be performed at only ~~with one~~ oblique
angle. However, by scanning ~~with at~~ two or more oblique
angles, the image quality of the tomographic image obtained
can be improved.

When tomographic data on an identical portion are
15 obtained with ultrasound scans using Fresnel-ring aperture 16
and strip-shaped aperture 14, the control means ~~controls~~
operates to calculate one ultrasound tomographic image from
tomographic information on an intersecting point of ultrasound
beams of an ultrasound tomographic image ~~that~~ which image
20 processing unit 9 obtains by ultrasound beam scanning in
different beam directions, as shown in Fig. 4. Next, image
processing unit 9 outputs the ultrasound tomographic image to
the monitor 10, and presents it on ~~a~~ the display surface of the
monitor 10.

25 Thus, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according
to Embodiment 1, an ultrasound beam scan in the normal line
direction of the probe surface is performed with Fresnel-ring
aperture 16, an ultrasound beam scan in the oblique direction,

which is different from the normal line direction of the probe surface, is performed with strip-shaped aperture 14, and ultrasound data acquired with the respective apertures ~~are is~~ calculated and formed into an ultrasonic image. Accordingly,
5 the image quality of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus can be improved without increasing the apparatus scale, i.e. with ~~the a~~ fewer number of channels of the received wave phasing unit 7 than that of the transducer elements 4.

Meanwhile, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus
10 according to Embodiment 1, Fresnel ring aperture 16 and strip-shaped aperture 14 are respectively formed in an area surrounded by the same number of transducer elements respectively in the X-axis and Y-axis directions, e.g. fourteen transducer elements in the X-axis direction and eight in the
15 Y-direction. However, as mentioned above, the actual apparatus structure is not limited thereto, and aperture 16 and aperture 14, of course, may be formed respectively in areas including another number of transducer elements. Further, aperture 16 and aperture 14, of course, may be formed in an
20 area including another number of transducer elements 4.

~~Further, in~~ In the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1, ultrasound scans of aperture 16 and of aperture 14 are sequentially performed and a tomographic image of high image quality is generated from
25 tomographic images collected in ~~the above these~~ scans. However, for instance, the following may also be applicable: the main body or the probe of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 1 ~~is~~ may be provided with

a mode of displaying a tomographic image obtained with an ultrasound scan consisting of either ~~of~~ aperture 16 or aperture 14 and a mode of displaying a tomographic image combining tomographic images obtained with an ultrasound scan of aperture 16 and aperture 14 using a compound scan image forming method. With this structure, a region of interest (ROI) is detected on the basis of a tomographic image obtained in the ultrasound scan mode of either aperture 16 or aperture 14; the ROI requiring its tomographic image of high image quality is ultrasound scanned by aperture 16 and aperture 14, and the mode is switched so as to generate a tomographic image by combining the ~~above~~-obtained tomographic images to be presented. By thus switching into the mode of generating and presenting a tomographic image combining the obtained tomographic images, ultrasound measurement can be performed in both ways suitable for detecting an ROI which requires real-time processing (display), rather than image quality, and for image display for definite diagnosis, which requires high image quality, whereby both diagnostic efficiency and diagnosability can be improved.

Meanwhile, according to Embodiment 1, all signals of one transducer array of the strip-shaped transducers are given the identical phasing data. However, with this structure, focusing in the row direction is not performed, and so the image quality might be unfavorable. Accordingly, when the row is long, a phasing circuit may be installed which divides fourteen transducers into e.g. five groups respectively ~~having~~ consisting of two, three, four, three, and two transducers and

which performs focusing in the row direction on the respective transducer groups.

(Embodiment 2)

~~Fig. 5 is a~~ Figs. 5(a), 5(b) and 5(c) are diagrams illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to an Embodiment 2 of the present invention. Specifically, Fig._5(a) is a diagram illustrating the structure where a tomographic image is collected by an aperture formed by concentric multiple rings, and Fig._5(b) is a diagram illustrating the structure where a tomographic image is collected by ~~the~~ transducer elements which are bundled into strip shapes. Meanwhile, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2, ~~the a~~ larger number of transducer elements 4 is ~~arranged~~ provided than in the two-dimensional array probe according to Embodiment 1, scans of aperture 16 and aperture 14 are performed in both the Y-axis and X-axis directions, and a plurality of ultrasonic tomographic images thus obtained are formed into a three-dimensional ultrasound image. Other ~~structures~~ structural features are similar to Embodiment 1. Accordingly, in the following description, the three-dimensional ultrasound image obtained by two-dimensional scans of apertures 16 and 14 along the probe surface will be described in detail.

As shown in Figs._5(a) and 5(b), the two-dimensional array probe according to Embodiment 2 includes ~~the a~~ larger number of transducer elements in the X-axis direction than that provided in ~~of~~ the two-dimensional array probe according to Embodiment 1. That is, the two-dimensional array probe

according to Embodiment 2 includes $27 \times 28 = 756$ transducer elements 4. Meanwhile, in the same manner as in Embodiment 1, Fresnel-ring aperture 16 and strip-shaped aperture 14, respectively, form areas surrounded by $14 \times 8 =$
5 112 transducer elements 4.

In the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2, as shown in Fig. 5(a), aperture 16 is formed in an area on the probe surface when Fresnel-ring aperture 16 is formed in the area of 14×8 transducer elements.

10 Accordingly, aperture 16 can perform a scan in both the arrow direction (Y-axis direction) and the X-axis direction shown in Fig. 5(a). Here, aperture 16 is moved in the Y-axis direction to collect a tomographic image while its position in the X-axis direction is fixed, and then it is moved in the X-axis direction
15 for ~~the a~~ predetermined number of transducer elements. After that, it is moved in the Y-axis direction again without scanning in the X-axis direction. In this manner, a tomographic image is obtained. Those operations (scanning) are repeated while aperture 16 moves from one end to the
20 other end in the X-axis direction, ~~thereby~~ whereby a plurality of tomographic images in the Y-axis direction can be collected without moving the two-dimensional array probe, ~~a the~~ moving distance in the X-axis direction of which is the length of transducer elements 4 in the X-axis direction. However,
25 because an ultrasound beam formed by Fresnel-ring aperture 16 runs in a normal-line direction of the probe surface, a tomographic image obtained by the scan of aperture 16 is collected by an ultrasound beam perpendicular to the probe

surface as in Embodiment 1, as described above. Further, aperture 16 performs scans in the X-axis and Y-axis directions, while the control means controls switching of each transducer selecting switch ~~constructing-forming~~ switch array 17 in
5 synchronism with the cycle of ultrasound transmission and reception to retain aperture 16.

On the other hand, as shown in Fig. 5(b), strip-shaped aperture 14, formed by 14 x 8 transducer elements, is also formed in an area of the probe surface. Accordingly, in a
10 similar manner to aperture 16, aperture 14 can perform a scan in both ~~an~~ the arrow direction (Y-axis direction) shown in Fig. 5(b) and the X-axis direction. Here, while the position of aperture 14 in the X-axis direction is fixed, aperture 14 is moved in the Y-axis direction to collect a tomographic image,
15 and then it is moved in the X-axis direction for a predetermined number of transducer elements. After that, aperture 14 is moved in the Y-axis direction again without moving in the X-axis direction. In this manner, a tomographic image is obtained. Those operations are repeated while
20 aperture 14 is moved from one end to the other end in the X-axis direction, ~~thereby~~ whereby a plurality of tomographic images in the Y-axis direction can be obtained without moving the two-dimensional array transducer, ~~a~~ that moving distance in the X-axis direction of which is the length of transducer
25 elements 4 in the X-axis direction.

_____ Meanwhile, as in Embodiment 1 described above, the ultrasound beam of aperture 14 according to Embodiment 2 runs in a direction other than the normal-line direction of the

probe surface. Further, the ultrasound beam direction of aperture 14 is inclined in a direction corresponding to the scan direction of aperture 14, i.e. the Y-axis direction. By thus inclining the ultrasound beam of aperture 14, an ultrasound
5 image on the same cross section as that collected by aperture 16 is collected with the oblique ultrasound beam. Further, aperture 14 performs scans in the X-axis and Y-axis directions while the control means controls switching of each transducer selecting switch ~~constructing~~forming switch array 17 in
10 synchronism with the cycle of ultrasound transmission and reception to retain aperture 14. Further, a tomographic image of the same cross section may be collected by again changing the oblique angle and the inclining direction of the ultrasound beam.

15 Next, in the same manner as in Embodiment 1, image processing unit 9 calculates a received signal on an intersecting point of the ultrasound beam of aperture 16 in the normal-line direction and in the direction of the inclined ultrasound beam of aperture 14 using a compound scan image
20 forming method, and a tomographic image parallel to the Y-axis direction is generated. Here, according to Embodiment 2, apertures 16 and 14 perform scans in the Y-axis direction at every movement thereof in the X-axis direction. Therefore, a plurality of two-dimensional
25 tomographic images are generated in the normal-line direction of the probe surface and in the Y-axis direction along the X-axis direction.

Here, for example, if an examiner operates an

operation panel (not shown) installed in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2 to instruct display of a three-dimensional image, image processing unit 9 first generates a three-dimensional image from a plurality of tomographic images. Next, image processing unit 9 performs known image processings, such as ~~the~~ a volume rendering, to convert the three-dimensional image into a two-dimensional image (three-dimensional ultrasound image) for display, and displays it on monitor 10.

10 As described above, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2, an ultrasound beam of aperture 16 in the normal-line direction of the probe surface and ~~that an ultrasound beam~~ of aperture 14 in a direction oblique with respect to the ultrasound beam of aperture 16 are
15 caused to scan an identical cross section and collect a tomographic image. Next, according to Embodiment 2, image processing unit 9 generates one tomographic image using ~~the~~ a compound scan image forming method in which tomographic information on an intersecting point of the ultrasound beams is
20 generated from the tomographic information collected by ultrasound beams in the different directions. Here, if an examiner operates a button of an operation panel (not shown) to instruct display of the tomographic image, i.e. the two-dimensional image, image processing unit 9 sequentially
25 outputs and displays the tomographic image generated with the compound scan onto ~~a~~ the display screen of the monitor 10.

Meanwhile, in a case where the examiner operates a

button of the operation panel (not shown) to instruct display of a three-dimensional image, image processing unit 9 reconstructs a three-dimensional image from the plurality of tomographic images generated with the compound scan. Next, image processing unit 9 performs the known volume rendering processing on the reconstructed three-dimensional image to generate a three-dimensional image for display (three-dimensional plane image) and outputs the thus-generated three-dimensional plane image, which is presented on ~~a~~the display screen.

In this case, an ultrasound beam scan in the normal-line direction of the probe surface is performed by Fresnel-ring aperture 16 including one portion of all transducer elements 4, an ultrasound beam scan in a different direction than the normal-line direction of the probe surface is performed by strip-shaped aperture 14, and an ultrasound tomographic image is calculated from ultrasound data obtained by the respective apertures. Accordingly, received wave phasing unit 7 can be constructed without increasing the apparatus scale, i.e. with ~~the~~a fewer number of channels than the number of transducer elements 4, while an ultrasound tomographic image of high resolution can be obtained using the two-dimensional ultrasound probe. Therefore, the image quality of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus can be improved, while received wave phasing unit 7 is constructed without increasing the apparatus scale, i.e. with ~~the~~a fewer ~~channel-~~number of channels than the number of ~~transducer~~transducers 4.

Meanwhile, although aperture 16 and aperture 14 of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according Embodiment 2 perform scans in the Y-axis direction, the scan direction is not limited thereto, and, of course, it may be in any direction in the probe surface. In this case, however, it is necessary to construct strip-shaped aperture 14 with ~~the few~~ a small number of element selecting switches and channels.

Therefore, the bundling direction of transducer elements bundled into strip shapes have to be set in correspondence with the scan direction of the ultrasound beam. For example, aperture 14 can perform a scan in a 45-degree direction between the X- and Y-axes by bundling a plurality of strips perpendicular to the scan direction.

Further, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2, scans of aperture 16 and aperture 14 are sequentially performed, and a three-dimensional image of high resolution is generated from the thus-collected tomographic images. Meanwhile, for example, it ~~may~~ is also ~~be applicable~~ possible for the main body or the probe unit of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 2 ~~is to be~~ given a mode of displaying a tomographic image or of generating a three-dimensional image obtained by ultrasound scans of either of aperture 16 or aperture 14 and a mode of generating a tomographic image combining the tomographic images obtained by aperture 16 and aperture 14 with ~~the~~ a compound scan or generating and displaying a three-dimensional image from thus-generated tomographic images. With this construction, it is possible to detect an

ROI on the basis of the tomographic image or the
three-dimensional image obtained in the ultrasound scan mode
of either of aperture 16 or aperture 14, and the mode is
shifted to the other mode for generating and displaying a
5 combined tomographic image or a three-dimensional image
when a tomographic image of high image quality of the ROI is
needed. Thus, the ROI can be immediately detected and
observed using ~~the~~ an image of high image quality (definite
diagnosis). As a result, ~~a~~ the diagnostic efficiency can be
10 improved.

Further, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus
according to Embodiment 2, the ultrasound beam ~~is~~ may be
inclined in the Y-axis direction, as shown in Fig. 5(c).
Besides, it can also be inclined in the X-axis direction by
15 setting aperture 14' formed by the transducers selected in
strip-shapes in the Y-axis direction from among transducer
elements 4.

When ~~the~~ a compound scan is performed using the
ultrasound beam inclined in the X-axis direction or in another
20 direction ~~too as well~~, ~~an~~ the area surrounded by the transducer
elements 4 is controlled so that a tomographic image is
generated from tomographic information on a position where
the ultrasound beams intersect on the basis of an ultrasound
tomographic image obtained by scans of the ultrasound beams
25 in the different beam directions in a similar manner to that
described above.

Accordingly, scans and image generation can be
performed in any direction in the probe surface, whereby

ultrasound diagnosis can be conducted on a wider area by waving the ultrasound beam also in the X-axis direction. Further, focusing can be done in the row direction of one transducer array of aperture 14 as in the above-described Embodiment 1.

(Embodiment 3)

Fig. 6 and Fig. 7 are diagrams illustrating the ~~schematic~~ structure of an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 3 of the present invention.

Specifically, Fig._6 is a diagram illustrating collection of tomographic image data using the aperture of a sparse array 16', and Fig._7 is a diagram illustrating collection of tomographic image data using the aperture of transducer elements bundled into strip shapes. ~~Meanwhile~~As an example, according to Embodiment 3, a two-dimensional array probe including $64 \times 64 = 4096$ transducer elements 4 is used. However, the number of transducer elements is not limited to 4096. Further, although a conventional sparse array does not need the array switch 17 in which a plurality of element selecting ~~switch~~switches are arranged, transducer element 4 is connected to received wave phasing unit 7 through array switch 17 according to Embodiment 3. With this structure, ultrasound transmission and reception of both sparse array 16' and of transducer elements 4 bundled into strip shapes are performed in an identical two-dimensional array probe by flipping the element selecting switch. That is, while the probe is applied to the object (not shown), ultrasound measurement ~~of~~can be switched between the sparse array

and of ~~the~~ trip-shaped aperture 14' ~~can be switched~~.

In the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 3, as shown in Fig. 6, 128 transducer elements among the $64 \times 64 = 4096$ transducer elements 4 ~~forms~~ form a
5 so-called sparse array used in ultrasound transmission and reception. However, in the ultrasound measurement of sparse array 16', the transducer elements used in transmission and reception are fixed. Accordingly, control means (not shown) operates to ~~switches~~ switch on the
10 predetermined element selecting switch among those forming array switch 17 to fix transducer elements used in wave transmission and those used in wave reception. This structure enables ~~the~~ ultrasound measurement using the sparse array. In the scan of the sparse array, a
15 predetermined phasing data is supplied to the respective transducers and the inside of a circular cone having a top ~~being~~ forming one point of the array surface is three-dimensionally scanned.

On the other hand, in the ultrasound measurement of
20 transducer elements 4 bundled into strips, 64×64 transducer elements 4 are bundled into a plurality of rows, e.g. 64 rows, of strips. Thus, the strip-shaped aperture 14" including all of the $64 \times 64 = 4096$ transducer elements 4 is formed. At this time, by adjusting the delay data or phasing data supplied to a
25 transmission signal supplied to transducer elements forming aperture 14" and the received signal output from the transducers, a central position of ultrasound beams of aperture 14" is set on a position shifted from the center of

aperture 14" (different position than ~~a~~the scan center of sparse array 16'). Next, a tomographic image of the object (not shown) is collected by a sector scan with respect to the position shifted from the central position of the aperture 14".

5 That is, the tomographic image of the object is collected by the sector scan, wherein the intersecting positions of the ultrasound beams formed by ultrasound transmission and reception of aperture 14" and the probe surface is shifted from the central position of aperture 14" in the Y-axis direction to a
10 predetermined distance. Meanwhile, the ultrasound beam is formed by applying a delay to each of ~~the~~ received ~~signal~~ signals output from the transducer elements at received wave phasing unit 7 and by summing up the received signals at signal processing unit 8 after applying the delay.

15 Further, the channel number of received wave phasing unit 7 for the sparse array is about four times that of the traditional apparatus. Therefore, in performing aperture 14" according to Embodiment 3, changing the connection of the array switch 17 and dividing the strips in the longitudinal
20 direction (X-axis direction) to be connected with received wave phasing unit 7 are performed, whereby the resolution and the S/N ratio of the collected tomographic image are further improved ~~than~~ over those obtained with the sparse array.

25 Next, image processing unit 9 performs a calculation based on information on ~~an~~ the intersecting positions of the ultrasound beams of tomographic images collected by aperture 16' and by aperture 14", and a tomographic image and/or a

three-dimensional image is generated from the calculated image data on the intersecting positions. Here, when display of the tomographic image is selected from an operation board (not shown), image processing unit 9 converts the generated tomographic image into data for display and ~~output~~ outputs the data to monitor 10 to present it on the display screen.

Meanwhile, when display of the three-dimensional image is selected, image processing unit 9 generates a two-dimensional image (three-dimensional ultrasound image) for display, which is generated from the three-dimensional image, outputs it to monitor 10 after converting this three-dimensional ultrasound image into data ~~for~~ compatible with the input format of monitor 10, and displays the three-dimensional ultrasound image on the screen of monitor 10.

As described above, in the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiment 3, sparse array aperture 16' and strip-shaped aperture 14", which are formed over the probe surface of the two-dimensional array probe, perform ~~the~~ a sector scan of an ultrasound beam on a desired cross section, while the central position of the ultrasound beams of the strip-shaped aperture 14" is set to a position shifted from the central position of aperture 16' to a predetermined degree. In this manner, received wave phasing unit 7 is constructed without increasing the apparatus scale, i.e. with ~~the~~ a fewer number of channels than transducer elements 4, and an ultrasound image on a desired cross section can be collected in which the ultrasound beams of aperture 16' and of aperture

14" intersect, whereby, with ~~the a~~ compound scan, a tomographic image of more improved image quality than each tomographic image can be generated. Accordingly, even when a three-dimensional image is generated by collecting a plurality of tomographic images with ~~the a~~ compound scan, the image quality of the three-dimensional image can be improved, and that of a three-dimensional ultrasound image ~~being~~ forming an ultrasound image for display generated from the three-dimensional image can also be improved.

Meanwhile, ~~in~~ In the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus according to Embodiments 1 and 2, the form of aperture 16' is a Fresnel ring concentrically bundling the elements. However, it is not limited thereto, and of course, it may be formed in an arbitrary shape such as an ellipse, a rectangle, and the like, by shifting the element selecting switch. In this case, aperture 16' transmits and receives an ultrasound beam that is focused in accordance with the arbitrary shape. However, it is needless to say that when aperture 16' is formed in the Fresnel-ring shape, the phasing circuit can be constructed with the least ~~channel~~ number of channels, and an ultrasound image of good S/N ratio can be obtained.

Although Embodiments 1 to 3 have been described for the case of generating a three-dimensional ultrasound image, they are not limited thereto and may have another structure. For example, when a three-dimensional image is reconstructed from tomographic images collected by Fresnel-ring aperture 16, the thus-obtained three-dimensional image is presented on monitor 10, and a tomographic image on an assigned cross

section is obtained on the basis of the tomographic image displayed on the monitor 10, ~~it, it~~ is needless to say that a tomographic image generated from tomographic images obtained with aperture 16 and aperture 14 may be displayed.

5 With this structure, it is possible to perform measurement of the tomographic images of aperture 16 and aperture 14, which takes a relatively long time, only on a collected tomographic image generally required in a definite diagnosis, whereby it is possible to reduce the time taken for collecting the
10 tomographic image required in definite diagnosis. As a result, it is possible to reduce ~~a~~the burden on the object and to improve ~~a~~the diagnostic efficiency.

Although Embodiments 1 to 3 only ~~disclose the employ~~ a compound scan using two ultrasound images, the compound
15 scan combining three or more ultrasound images may be performed. Further, although ~~the a~~ three-dimensional display is ~~done~~ produced by performing ~~the~~ volume rendering processing on the scanned volume data in the above-described embodiments description, ~~it the invention is~~
20 not limited thereto. For example, it may be done in a manner such that a point of view is determined and a two-dimensional image taken from the point of view is displayed by determining transmittance in each voxel as if a light is transmitted through the two-dimensional image in accordance with the sound
25 intensity along the line of vision.

Further, a plurality of collected tomographic images may be sequentially presented in accordance with ~~an the~~ operation of an image switching button provided on the control

board. That is, although ~~the~~ a three-dimensional plane image is generated with the volume rendering processing according to Embodiments 2 and 3, the manner of generating the three-dimensional plane image to be displayed from the three-dimensional image is not limited to the use of volume rendering processing, and it may be produced in another manner. Further, ~~a~~ the display format is not limited to that of a two-dimensional image and may be a known display format of a three-dimensional image.

10 Further, although the scan method is changed in units of a frame-unit, it may be changed at every raster to produce compound data at each raster and perform a scan.

The invention ~~done by the present inventors~~ has been described in detail in accordance with ~~the~~ various 15 embodiments thereof. However, the present invention is not limited to those embodiments and various changes may ~~of course~~ be made within the scope of the summary invention.